

How Low Can AT&T Go -- its Bribing Charities And Liberal Civil Rights Groups like the NAACP to support its jobs killing anti consumer and anti competitive T Mobil merger.

Rev. R. Henry Martin directs the Shreveport-Bossier Rescue Mission, a Louisiana-based ministry that reaches out to feed, clothe, shelter and provide healing services to homeless men, women and families with children. The ministry aided 1,200 people in 2010, served over 135,000 meals and is open to those in need 365 days a year.

This is all noble work, but what the heck does it have to do with the AT&T/T-Mobile merger?

The answer, of course, is absolutely nothing. So why did Rev. Martin feel compelled to write a letter to the FCC urging it to approve the takeover?

According to a Center for Public Integrity report released on Monday, at least two dozen charities that received AT&T bucks have plugged the merger, writing letters urging the FCC to seal the deal. The Shreveport-Bossier Rescue Mission, for one, raked in \$50,000 from AT&T earlier this year. Perhaps it was that cash infusion that inspired this heartfelt testimonial:

It is important that we, as Christians, never stop working on behalf of the underserved and forgotten, Rev. Martin wrote in a June letter to FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski. It might seem like an out-of-place endorsement, but I am writing today in order to convey our support for the AT&T/T-Mobile merger. People often call on God to help the outcasts and downtrodden that walk among us. Sometimes, however, it is our responsibility to take matters into their own hands. Please support this merger.

What a merger that would result in 20,000 lost jobs, jacked-up fees and the destruction of competition in the wireless market has to do with God's work is anyone's guess.

Other recipients of AT&T money that backed the deal include the American Foundation for the Blind (\$10,000 to \$15,000 per year), the National Disability Institute (\$50,000) and the United Way of Northwest Florida (an average of \$22,157 per year since 2007).

While it's hard to say whether AT&T engaged in a literal quid pro quo with these nonprofits, the CPI report does note that the company at least approached many of these organizations about writing letters to the FCC.

Angela Patton is the sole employee of Camp Diva, a Richmond, Va.-based nonprofit that sends inner-city girls to summer camp and runs afterschool programs. She told CPI that an AT&T official who handles donations to Camp Diva told her they were interested to see what our opinions were [about the merger] and could we be of support. Patton told CPI that Camp Diva is suffering and needs AT&T's support.

AT&T has been playing this game of I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine since announcing the merger in March. Key to its efforts has been Jim Cicconi, the company's chief lobbyist who also runs AT&T's charitable foundation. This blurring between church and state, as it were, has allowed AT&T to strategically target its contributions.

They have curried favor with organizations who, whether through direct or indirect expectations, will go to bat for them, Ellen Miller, executive director of the Sunlight Foundation, told the Washington

Post's Cecilia Kang in May. "That's what a sophisticated lobby does, and AT&T is among the top of this in Washington."

Corporate abuses shock no one at this point. But what makes the CPI report especially disturbing is how dependent many of these charitable groups are on AT&T for their very existence.

Camp Diva isn't the only AT&T recipient that's fighting to stay afloat. The Boys & Girls Club in Neshoba County, Miss., is in a district with a 24.2 percent poverty rate and a median household income of \$29,835. Volunteer Rae Ellen Gordon wrote to the FCC on behalf of her organization. "If I was asked to write a letter it would have to be something I would believe in," Gordon told CPI. "We're still very new, we're still struggling financially."

Indeed, it's striking how many of these AT&T recipients — including the Boys & Girls Club of El Dorado County, Calif., and the Delta Arts Alliance on the Mississippi coast — are based in regions plagued with poverty and high unemployment. These organizations undoubtedly felt they were in no position to bite the hand that feeds them — and AT&T knew that.

AT&T's T Mobil merger should be denied. As should the Qualcomm merger as I've stated earlier for good measure. Tell Ma Bell No Ma Cell For You!